

CLAIMS**What is claimed is:**

1. A system, for distributing streaming media via a data communications medium such as the Internet, said streaming media composed of a plurality of time-sequenced data elements, comprising:
 - (a) a server connected to said data communications medium for transmitting said data elements;
 - (b) a server buffer for storing at least one of said data elements for transmission;
 - (c) means for receiving said data elements sequentially;
 - 10 (d) a server buffer manager comprising means for supplying said server buffer with a predetermined number of data elements at a constant time-sequenced fill rate, and when said server buffer is full, for each new data element to be received into the buffer, deleting the oldest data element from the buffer;
 - (e) at least one user computer connected to said server via said data communications medium;
 - 15 (f) a user buffer associated with said user computer and being provided with means for storing a predetermined number of said data elements, which predetermined number may be different from the predetermined number of data elements to be stored in the server buffer; and
 - 20 (g) a user buffer manager associated with said user computer and being provided with means for receiving data elements into the buffer, and playing out audio/video material from said user buffer at a constant time-sequenced depletion rate;

(h) a means for maintaining a record for each user of the last data element that had been sent, and for causing additional media data to be sent until all the data elements in the server buffer have been sent to said user computer, said means arranged in such a way as to maintain the pre-determined number of data elements in the user buffer,

whereby said server sends said sequential data elements at a data rate as fast as the data connection between the server and the user computer will support.

2. A system as recited by claim 1, wherein said user computer is an Internet radio.

3. A system for distributing streaming media via a data communications medium such as the Internet, said streaming media composed of a plurality of time-sequenced data elements, comprising:

(a) a source computer system being provided with media source material data elements, and being connected to said data communications medium for transmitting said data elements to a server computer;

(b) a server connected to said data communications medium for receiving said data elements from said source computer system, and for transmitting said data elements to user computers;

(c) a server buffer for storing at least one of said data element for transmission;

(d) a means for receiving said data elements sequentially;

(e) a server buffer manager comprising means for receiving said data elements that have been transmitted by the source computer system, supplying said server buffer with a predetermined number of data elements at a constant time-

sequenced fill rate, and when said server buffer is full, for each new data element to be received into the buffer, deleting the oldest data element from the buffer;

(f) at least one user computer connected to said distribution server via said data communications medium;

5 (g) a user buffer associated with said user computer and being provided with means for storing a predetermined number of said data elements, which predetermined number may be different from the predetermined number of data elements to be stored in the server buffer; and

10 (h) a user buffer manager associated with said user computer and being provided with means for receiving data elements into the buffer, and playing out audio/video material from said user buffer at a constant time-sequenced depletion rate;

15 (i) a means for maintaining a record for each user of the last data element that had been sent, and for causing additional media data to be sent until all the data elements in the server buffer have been sent to said user computer, said means arranged in such a way as to maintain the pre-determined number of data elements in the user buffer;

whereby said server sends said sequential data elements at a data rate as fast as the data connection between the server and the user computer will support.

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4. A system as recited by claim 3, wherein said user computer is an Internet radio.

5. A method for distributing streaming media via a data communications medium such as the Internet from a server, said streaming media composed of a plurality of time-sequenced data elements, comprising the steps of:

- (a) providing a plurality of time-sequenced data elements;
- 5 (b) loading a predetermined number of said data elements sequentially into a server buffer, which process continues indefinitely as long as there is media data available;
- (c) when said server buffer is full with said predetermined number of said data elements, deleting from said server buffer the oldest data element each time a
10 new data element is loaded into the buffer, the loading arrangement being adapted to maintain the predetermined number of data elements in the buffer;
- (d) sending via said data communications medium a group of said data elements sequentially from said server buffer to a user computer connected to said Internet as fast as the connection between the server and the user computer will
15 allow;
- (e) loading said sent group of data elements into a user's buffer associated with said user computer;
- (f) playing said media on said user computer as soon as said data elements first arrive, said played data elements being deleted from said user buffer;
- 20 (g) maintaining a record of the last data element having been sent to a user;
- (h) if said user buffer is not full, sending the next sequential data elements to said user computer in such a manner that fills the user buffer to a predetermined number of data elements, and maintains that predetermined number of data elements in the buffer; and

- (i) repeating steps “(b)” through “(h)” until all of said data elements of the streaming media are played by said user computer.

6. A method as recited by claim 5, wherein said user computer is an Internet radio.